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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000323

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: OONI OF IFE CALLS YAR'ADUA "RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB"

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A close supporter of President Obasanjo, the Ooni of Ife, believes Yar'Adua is "the right man for the job" of President. The Ooni believes opposition criticisms of the election, although strident, will yield little concrete action and will dissipate quickly. The Ooni was collaborating with northern traditional leaders, including the Emir of Kano, to urge opposition leaders to accept the election result. The Ooni said All-Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) candidate Buhari genuinely lost because he never gained a foothold in the south and lost much of his previous traction in the north. The Federal Government found the post-election statement issued by the United States "very diplomatic", according to the Ooni's nephew, Aviation Minister Femi Fani-Kayode. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a May 1 conversation, the Ooni of Ife told the Consul General "the right man had been selected" as President of Nigeria. Yar'Adua is "quiet, not arrogant", the Ooni said. The Ooni believed that Yar'Adua would be a conciliatory figure whose personal humility will allow him to reach out to opposition figures in an effort salve political wounds. In this vein, the Ooni has been working with other traditional rulers to ease tensions resulting from the election. On his part, the Ooni issued a televised statement calling for calm and a recognition of the electoral results. Because of his position as the principal Yoruba traditional ruler, this message carried great weight not only in the Southwest but also throughout Nigeria, the Ooni asserted.

¶3. (C) Additionally, he has been working with the Emir of Kano and other traditional rulers nationwide. The Ooni claimed the Emir had basically gotten the Northern traditional leaders to endorse the election results and to appeal to their subjects not to allow opposition political leaders to sway them toward acts of civil disturbance or disobedience. On a daily basis, more and more opposition figures are extending a hand to Yar'Adua in the hopes of

having access to power after the May 29 inauguration. Even Vice president Atiku is meeting Yar'Adua, asserted the Ooni. He said Atiku had resigned himself to returning to his hometown of Yola (Adamawa State). At this point, Atiku would be satisfied if given the opportunity to designate two of his partisans for cabinet ministers in the new government, maintained the Ooni.

¶4. (C) The Ooni claimed Buhari clearly lost the election and has been revealed to be a spent political force. He asserted Buhari had alienated northern traditional rulers as well as the ANPP governors in the northern states. These governors fought for their elections but, when it came to the presidential race, they abandoned their candidate in favor of their gubernatorial colleague Yar'Adua. Without the support of these governors, Buhari had no chance of winning these states, explained the Ooni. Buhari also grossly underestimated the political strength of his few Yoruba supporters like former Finance Minister Olu Falae. Thus Buhari thought he had made strong headway in the Southwest when all he took was a minuscule step, the Ooni posited. A more telling indicator of the Yoruba view of Buhari was the manner the widow of Obafemi Awolowo rebuffed Buhari's request to see her. The Ooni recounted not only did she refuse to see the Northern "jihadist", but she asked the Ooni to tell Buhari that she prayed daily Buhari would not become President again.

¶5. (C) Buhari could never rule Nigeria, the Ooni commented, because the common man in Nigeria does not believe in him. Buhari represents the opposite extreme from Yar'Adua, the Ooni stated. The Ooni said Buhari was haughty and mean-spirited. Another retired general from Katsina recently warned the Ooni that Buhari was an ungenerous, vindictive soul who did not relate well with most people.

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¶6. (C) The Ooni's approbation of Buhari even extended to the point of disparaging his family lineage. The Ooni asserted that Yar'Adua was related to the Emir of Daura but that Buhari's bloodline could be traced to a family of slaves of that same royal household. While Yar'Adua was princely and well-suited for leadership, Buhari internally boiled with resentment at his family's low station and wanted to rip at the venerated institution of the traditional rulers, the Ooni expostulated. (Comment: While Nigeria remains very much a traditional society, the comments about Buhari's family are nevertheless jarring. They reveal the extent to which PDP partisans are willing to go to justify what occurred on election day. Selective amnesia is also at play. The revered first President of Nigeria, Tafawa Balawa, was also the son of a family deemed to be a part of the slave caste. End Comment)

¶7. (C) Minister of Aviation Femi Fani-Kayode, the Ooni's nephew, said that the Federal Government was pleased with the Department's statement on the elections. The message was "very diplomatic", Fani-Kayode said, unlike that from the U.K. Fani-Kayode also bristled that the British High Commissioner said his government would likely not send a delegation to the inauguration ceremony. Stressing that we saw the recent election as seriously flawed, the Consul General urged the incoming Administration to begin immediately to seek the assistance of international partners for the 2011 election. By acknowledging the election flaws instead of trying to defend them, such a move would help reassure international and domestic audiences alike, he said.

¶8. (C) Comment: Approval of Yar'Adua by this traditional ruler was a foregone conclusion given the Ooni's closeness to President Obasanjo. Yoruba traditional rule is not as highly centralized as the Hausa north, and the authority of traditional rulers has been weakened over time; nonetheless, the Ooni's stature is widely recognized, and his approval of

Yar'Adua will help quiet the Southwest to some extent. The Ooni likely overestimates, however, the ease with which the opposition will acclimate. Even in the Southwest, where the Ooni is literally king, those who oppose the election have not yet thrown in the towel.

BROWNE